



# The Augur

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## Biblical Numystery

### WHAT WAS THE "CHEVER HA YEHUDYM"?

by Mel Wacks

For about 50 years during the first century B.C., four Hasmonean kings issued similar small bronze "mites". There is still some disagreement among experts as to the exact attribution of these coins, which will be discussed briefly later. The obverse of these coins features an ancient Hebrew inscription within a wreath, starting with the name of the ruler Yehochanan, Yehod, Yehonatan or Yonatan, and continuing "HaCoHeN HaGaDOL VeCheVeR (or HaCheVeR) HaYeHUDYM". The first two words mean "High Priest", the most important religious post in ancient Judaea, which was assumed by these Hasmonean leaders.

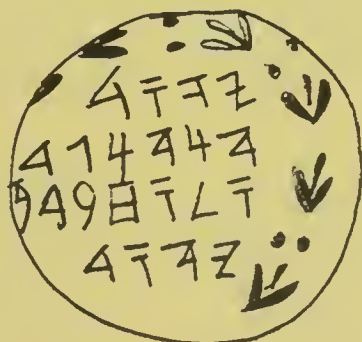
The first High Priest was Aaron, and the office continued in the hands of his descendants for some time: "And take thou unto thee Aaron thy (Moses') brother and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Exodus 28:1). In later times the High Priest was also head of the Sanhedrin, the body which appointed him. In the early Second Temple period, after the return from the Babylonian Exile in 538 B.C., the High Priest also acted as the political head of the nation, recognized as such by foreign rulers who charged him with maintaining order and collecting and delivering taxes. The office was in the hands of the Zadokite family until assumed by the Hasmoneans.

### Transference of High Priesthood to Hasmoneans

It was in the midst of the great struggle for Jewish independence from the Syrians, in 159 B.C., that the High Priest Alcimus began to tear down the balustrade separating the inner and outer courts of the Temple. This wall was recorded as the "works of the prophet" (I Macc. 9:54). But soon after inaugurating this project, Alcimus was stricken with apoplexy, his body became paralyzed, and he died in great pain.

For several years after Alcimus' unnatural death, there was no High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple. In the year 153 the Syrian throne was challenged by a youth of lowly origin — Alexander Balas. Both the pretender Balas and the unpopular Demetrius Soter of the royal Seleucid family, sought military alliances with Jonathan the Maccabee. Balas offered him the highest privilege in Judaea — appointment as the High Priest. Thus, on the Festival of Tabernacles a priest of the Hasmonean line officiated as High Priest in the Temple for the first time. With this, the High Priesthood passed from the descendants of Zadok, who had kept the office in their hands for over 800 years!

### Coin-of-the-Month



Bronze of "Yehod", attributed by Reifenberg to Judah Aristobulus (104-103 BC) and by Meshorer to Judah Aristobulus II (67-64 B.C.).





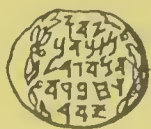
Alexander Balas  
150-145 BC



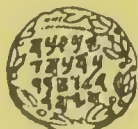
Demetrius Soter  
162-150 BC

Demetrius sought to counter Balas' offer by making extravagant promises to exempt the Jews from certain taxes, to free Jewish prisoners of war, to cede areas in Samaria to Judaea, to contribute a large sum to the Temple, etc. But Jonathan realized that Demetrius would likely break these lavish promises as soon as his position improved. And the Jewish leader also discerned that Demetrius had no hope of success, for he was hated both by his own people and the neighboring countries. Fortunately he was correct... in 150 B.C. Demetrius was defeated and Jonathan's ally Alexander Balas became King of Syria. Klausner (The Hellenistic Age) sums up Jonathan's accomplishments: "Judah Maccabee had bequeathed him only a small band of enthusiasts inspired by the ideals of religious liberty and political liberation and spurred on by the ambition of extending the borders of small Judea. Jonathan turned this band into a People. From the leader of a small band he became the head of a nation, and from a hunted rebel, High Priest, commander of a national army, and almost the independent ruler of his country. Furthermore, Jonathan began the transformation of little Judea into the Greater Land of Israel; ostensibly in the name of the Syrian king, he conquered practically all the cities of the Syrian Greeks and Hellenized Canaanites in Judea and Galilee. He was also concerned about the country's economic life which he sought to improve by securing an outlet to the sea. It appears too that he was responsible for transforming the *Hever ha-Yehudim* into a national council to head the nation, enact its laws, and supervise its religious, political, and economic affairs. Jonathan thus paved the way for the complete liberation of Judea. All that remained for his brother Simeon to do was to proclaim Judea's independence and to obtain confirmation of this from the king of Syria."

The High Priesthood went from the hands of Jonathan Maccabee to his brother Simon, and then to Simon's son John Hyrcanus I, who assumed the title in 134 B.C. According to Reifenberg and others, the first Jewish coins were minted during the reign of John Hyrcanus I (135-104 B.C.), when the Hebrew name Yehochanan was used in the inscriptions. On the other hand, Meshorer leads an expert contingent hypothesizing that the first coins were issued by Hyrcanus' son, Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.), with the Hebrew name Yehonatan or Yonatan.



Yehonatan



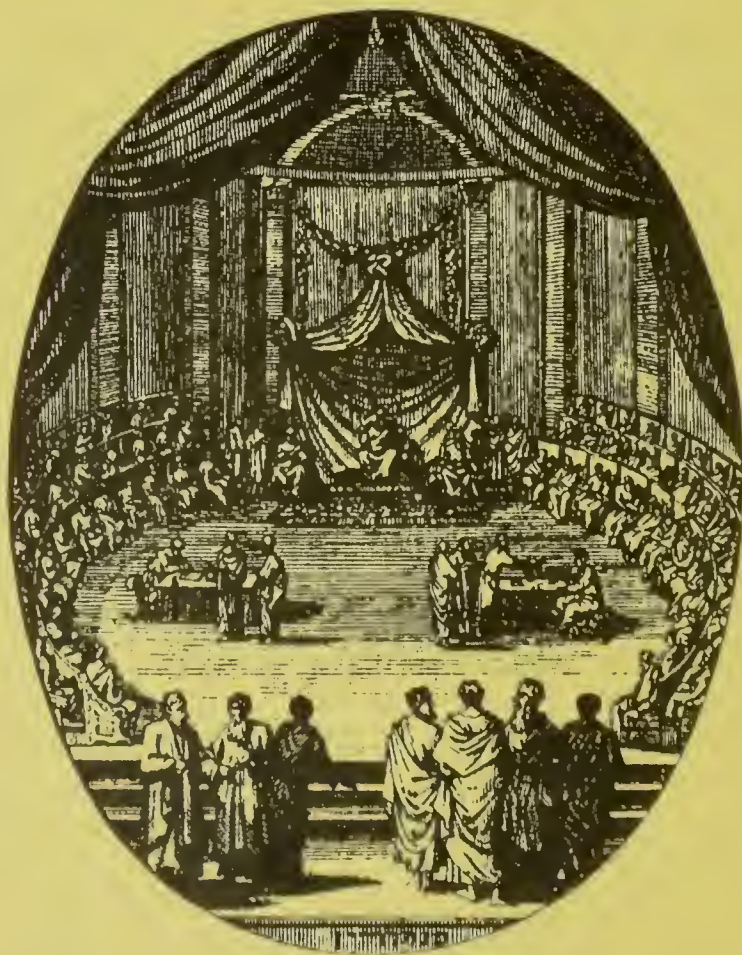
Yonatan

Let us now discuss the second half of the coin inscription "CheVeR Ha YeHUDYM". As you just read, Klausner believes this expression means a national council. But there are an unusual number of alternate theories proposed.

In a recent article, Howard Brin (The Mystery of the Inscription on Hasmonean Coins, SAN Journal, Spring 1980), discards the possibility that the CheVeR Ha YeHUDYM is a body of people. Brin writes "There is a notable lack of reference to any Jewish Senate or community in any known material for the 66 year period from Alexander Jannaeus to Antigonus Mattathias except for the phrase on the coins. Thus, there is no outside corroboration for the theory of either a community of the Jews or a Senate of the Jews."

However, whether or not the CheVeR Ha YeHUDYM actually existed as an institution in the period the coins were issued, would seem to me not to be critical. The Jews were a very traditional-minded people... after all, almost a century later Simon Bar Kochba issued coins showing the Holy of Holies of the Temple even though it had been destroyed some 60 years earlier. So why couldn't the confirmation of the most important office — High Priest — by a group of prominent citizens be remembered on coinage years after the event had taken place? And, indeed, such an event definitely did occur.

Initially, the Hasmoneans (alias the Maccabees) were self-appointed rulers. No one had elected them, they were a family of common priests from a small town. Finally the time came for an overt act by the people to confirm the rule of the Hasmoneans. In 141



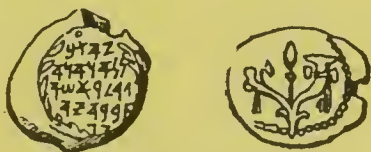
A sitting of the Sanhedrin illustrating the mishnaic tractate Sanhedrin on courts of justice and criminal procedure. Detail from a title page on a Hebrew-Latin edition of the Mishnah with engravings by Mich. Richey, Amsterdam, 1700 1704. Jerusalem, J.N.U.L.



B.C. in the third year of Simon Maccabee's de facto leadership, a "Great Assembly" (Sanhedrin) of priests and national leaders convened (I Macc. 14:28). The assembly confirmed Simon the Hasmonean as High Priest, commander of the army, and ethnarch of the people, "forever until a faithful prophet should arise." That is, the office of High Priest was to be handed down from father to son, until the appearance of the Prophet Elijah re-established the Messianic Kingdom. This historic resolution was engraved on tablets of brass which were placed in the courtyard of the Temple. From this decision "it was but one short step to the kingship of the Hasmonean dynasty" (Klausner). Surely it was significant enough to be memorialized on the coins of the Hasmonean rulers who could trace their title of High Priest back to the "Great Assembly". So it is likely that the "CheVeR Ha YeHUDYM" was in reality this same gathering.

#### Further Supporting Evidence

If the form of normal inscription on the bronze coins of Yehochanan was always "Yehochanan Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Ha Chever Ha Yehodym", then it could very well mean The High Priest, the Leader of the Jews. But some of these coins have a small variation — "Yehochanan Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Ve Chever Ha Yehudym" (Ha = the, whereas Ve = and). That would seem to be stressing the fact that two entities were being referred to; the High Priest and Senate of the Jews. (Note that Chever can be translated as either "leader" or "senate".)



"Rosh"-type

On a small percentage of Yehochanan's coins, an expanded form of the inscription was used: Yehochanan Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Rosh Ha Chever Ha Yehudym. If "rosh" was meant as the second of three titles, the inscription would likely read: "Yehochanan Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Ha Rosh Ha Chever Ha Yehudym". If "rosh" was meant as the second of three titles, the inscription would likely read: "Yehochanan Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Ha Rosh Ha Chever Ha Yehudym". (Yehochanan the High Priest, Head, and Leader of the Jews). But rosh does not have the definite article "the" that would tie it together with the first part of this compound sentence. Thus, I would conclude that rosh starts the second part of the sentence, which would then be translated as "Yehochanan the High Priest, the Head of the Senate of the Jews".

And thus the regular inscription without rosh, as used on the coins of four consecutive Hasmonean rulers, "(name) Ha Cohen Ha Gadol Ve Chever (or Ha Chever) Ha Yehudym" would mean "(name) the High Priest and Senate of the Jews". The Encyclopedia Judaica indicates that this Senate is regarded by some "as a council associated with the ruler, composed of aristocrats, priests, and scholars; in a later period it was known as the Sanhedrin, its origin being in the Gerusia, known to have existed before the Hasmonean period."

## Bibliophile Corner

### Jerusalem Under the Byzantines, Arabs and Crusaders

by Rev. Edgar Rogers (1914)

Under the Byzantine Emperors, as is natural, Jerusalem attained a high prosperity; while previous to the zeal of the Empress Helena, who discovered the true Cross, raised Jerusalem higher than ever in the estimation of Christendom. The golden age of the Holy City seemed to have returned for an all too brief space, before it was lost to Jew and Christian alike.

The Emperor Julian (362 A.D.) encouraged an abortive attempt of the Jews to rebuild the Temple, which was frustrated by a terrible earthquake and fire.



Julian, 361-363 AD

Jerusalem became the centre of devout pilgrimages for many years; and one of the clearest and most famous accounts of early Christian worship is to be found in the writings of S. Silvia, about 384 A.D. With the Council of Chalcedon 451-453 A.D. Jerusalem was constituted an independent Patriarchate and played a prominent part in doctrinal controversies. Churches, monasteries and shrines were built in profusion. The Empress Eudocia, after her exile from Constantinople, spent the last sixteen years of her life in Jerusalem and built upon a generous and munificent scale; the Emperor Justinian did so in like manner, and founded the famous Church in honour of the Blessed Virgin.



Justinian  
527-565 AD



Eudocia  
408-450 AD

This period of calm and prosperity — for Jerusalem had become not only the centre of Christian devotion, but a rich market for the traders of the Mediterranean — was savagely broken in upon by the Invasion of the Persians under Chosroes II in 614 A.D., when the City was taken, clergy and monks massacred, and Churches, schools, almshouses and monasteries ruthlessly burned. Treasurers and relics were carried off and it was not until fourteen years after, that the Roman armies were victorious and in A.D. 628 the Emperor Heraclius re-entered the Holy City, bearing with him in token of his success, the Wood of the True Cross — which Chosroes had taken in his assault.

The golden age of the Holy City was past; and its respite of peace but short. In A.D. 637 after a few months' siege, the Arabs or Saracens, as we know them, captured Jerusalem, and began the Moslem occupation.





**Chosroes II (Xusro II)**  
591-628 AD

There remain some very interesting coins of this Mahommedan success, fashioned after the types of the current Byzantine pieces, except that the crescent takes the place of the Cross. Various mints are represented: Tiberias, Damascus and Baalbek, or Heliopolis, are familiar names.

A similar coin was struck at Tiberias. These belong to the Kaliph 'Abd-al-Malik ibn Marwan. A.D. 684-705.



**Kaliph Abd-al-Malik**  
Palestine, c. 695 AD

From this point the story must hurry on. In the time of Charlemagne (771-814) an embassy was sent to distribute alms in the Holy City and the liberal-minded Kaliph, the famous Harun er-Rashid replied by sending Charlemagne the keys of Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre. But such friendly relations did not last for long; and the Moslems themselves fell into a state of anarchy. Jerusalem still remained the goal of the pious and pilgrimages were frequent. The Mussalmans of the eleventh century not only turned these pilgrimages to a source of revenue, by exacting a byzant from every visitor to the Holy Sepulchre, but their ill-treatment of the pilgrims was one of the reasons for the Crusades.

It was no easy task that the Arabs had, to retain the Holy City. The Turcoman hordes were upon them, and the last days of the eleventh century were a time of travail for Jerusalem, which was crowned when, on June 7, 1099, the Crusading Host was marshalled against its walls.

The Crusades were the dream of Peter Gautier, or Peter the Hermit, as he is called, a French officer of Amiens, who became pilgrim and preacher. He obtained from Urban II, the Pope, the commission to arouse Europe to fight for the holy places. Urban convened the Council of Clermont, at which all the ambassadors of the great powers of Europe were present, and the Crusades were determined upon with the sanction of Holy Church. There were eight in all, the last in 1270, when after 21 years' conflict, the

Sultan took Acre and the Christians were driven out of Syria. It must be left to others beside the numismatist to moralise upon the Crusades. At least he knows that common cause against the Infidel procured the peace of Europe; the great nations developed, and the lesson of chivalry, of mercy and compassion — in the establishment of Hospital and Chapelry — has borne a gracious fruit alike in peace and war today.

For the numismatist the first interest lies in the fact that many coins remain to bear their witness of this conflict; and for the description of them, as well as for the historical comments, which illuminate them, I am wholly indebted to my friend Mr. L. Forrer.

The first effort of the Crusaders was triumphantly successful. Forty thousand in number they assailed the Holy City. On July 15, 1099, it had fallen into their hands after prodigies of valour. It is said that they took a terrible revenge upon the infidel in the slaughter of 70,000 Saracens. Churches were established and for eighty-eight years Jerusalem remained in the power of the Christians, until Saladin retook it for the Moslem in 1187. For more than a hundred years the Crusades ran their course with varying success, until their final defeat.

The first capture of Jerusalem by the Christians was signalled by the foundation of a Kingdom; and on 23 July 1099, Godfrey, Duke of Basse-Lorraine, seigneur of Bouillon, was named King of Jerusalem.



**Holy Sepulchre**  
Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1162-1173 AD

This Kingdom was incorporated into that of Cyprus in 1268 and ceased to exist after the capture of Saint-Jean D'Acre, 1291.



**Kingdom of Cyprus and Jerusalem**  
1253-1267 AD

Among the most interesting coins of the Latin Orient is a small billon coin with TVRRIS. David's Tower (at Jerusalem); Reverse with DAVIT. Eight-rayed star. This has been considered as an obsidional coin struck in 1187 on the approach of Saladin's army.



**David's Tower**  
Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1187 AD